

Thanksgiving and Yours.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON

Thanksgiving Day, December 7, 1865.

IN THE

UPPER OCTORARA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PA.,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. J. J. POMEROY, A. M.,

Formerly Chaplain of 3rd Reg't P. R. A., and 198th Reg't P. V.

COATESVILLE, PA.

WM. L. KAUFFMAN & BROS., PRINTERS
1866.



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Correspondence.

PARKESBURG, Dec. 11, 1865.

To the Rev. JOHN J. POMEROY,

Dear Sir:—*The Board of Trustees of Upper Octorara Church, have instructed us to earnestly request you to give us, for publication, a copy of the able and patriotic Sermon delivered in our Church, on the 7th of December, 1865, appointed by the President of the United States as a day of National Thanksgiving. By complying with the above request you will enable us to give all our pew holders a copy.*

Yours, &c.,

ROBERT PARKE,
President of Board of Trustees.

SAM'L. D. McCLELLAN, Sec'y.

TO THE TRUSTEES OF UPPER OCTORARA CHURCH,

GENTLEMEN:—*In compliance with your request, I place my Thanksgiving Sermon at your disposal.*

Yours truly,

J. J. POMEROY.

December 14, 1865.

Thanksgiving and Vows.

“Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.”
—Ps. 50, 14.

The principal elements which constitute true worship, are adoration, confession, supplication and thanksgiving. God’s dealings with us as individuals, as communities, as a nation, and the different states of our minds will cause us to give preponderance to that element of worship, which is most in harmony with the outward circumstances that affect us, and the complexion of the inner life which prompts us.

When contemplating the glorious character of God: His infinite wisdom, His mighty power, His unimpeachable truth, His unchangeable justice, His spotless purity, His wonderful grace and unbounded love, it is then that the heart swells with adoration, and faithful lips will exclaim—Thou art “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.”—I Tim. i, 17.

Who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?”—Ps. lxxxix, 6. “Thou art great and dost wondrous things: thou art God alone.” Ps. lxxxvi, 10.

Making ourselves subjects of thought, analyzing our characters, our states of heart, our thoughts, our words, our deeds, and then remembering that the result of this self-examination is already before the omniscient God, we bow very low in His presence, with grief and sorrow, and in the spirit of humble confession we would address Him, “O Lord to us belong confusion of face, because we have sinned against Thee.”—Dan. ix, 8. We are “a seed of evil doers.”—Ps. i, 4. “We are all gone aside, we are altogether become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”—Ps. xiv, 3.

This sense of sin, which reveals itself in still greater enormity the further the process of self-examination is carried on, and at the same time the knowledge that there is pardon through the merits and intercession of the Lord Jesus, will cause us to flee to Him as our only hope, crying with the importunate voice of supplication, “O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me.”—Is. xxxviii, 14.

Again there are times when God’s mercies, His temporal and spiritual blessings, appear to rise so high above the ordinary plan of His profuseness, that the most indolent and unobserving Christians are aroused to a sense of His goodness: and they attract the attention

of men of the world who will not be reminded of the existence of God except when something extraordinary crosses their path.

I. Do we not to-day stand on this high plain, this table-land of God's beneficence and mercy? There must be something peculiarly blessed in our condition since we have the injunction from our State Executive, and from the President of our nation that we render thanksgiving this day to the God of our fathers and our God. These requests find a ready response from a thankful and Christian people who now through the temples of the living God, and with a unison and harmony that rises with a grand diapason of national praise, sing. "Bless the Lord O my soul: and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all His benefits."—Ps. ciii, 1, 2.

As individuals, as a community, as a state we have received much from the hand of the Lord for which we should be thankful. Our first duty to-day, however, is, to stand up in our National Capacity and thank the Lord of Nations that he did not permit us to be torn into fragments, and scattered as poor despised wayfarers upon the face of the earth, without homes, without a country, without a government, without a name. We thank the Lord to-day, that we rise into the proud consciousness of the fact that we are an integral people, a nation, and have a government, purified and strengthened we fondly hope and pray, because of the fiery ordeal through which we have passed.

Retaining our attitude of thanksgiving to God it is not inappropriate at such a time as this to recount something of our past history. Standing as we do upon the threshold of a new epoch commencing a new volume in the history of our national life we can look down through the vista of the past, and thank God for the honorable and historic prominence he has given us among the nations of the earth. Over three hundred years ago when European Despots trampled into the dust, with imperious feet, civil and religious liberty, God who reveals the riches and extent of the earth at His will, opened up this then unknown land as an asylum to our fathers. They came not hither as mere excursionists, or explorers; nor were they impelled to seek these western wilds by the wonderful stories of fabulous wealth that was said to be strewed in rich gems among the sands of the sea beach, in the river courses and in precious metals, hid among the rocks and imbedded in the earth. They sought a pearl more precious than all these. While they fled the exactions of a State Church establishment that forbade them worship God in the simplicity of scriptural forms, they sought refuge here that they might enjoy the precious love of civil and religious liberty. The same tyrannizing power that drove them from the mother country with its bitter and continuous oppressions followed them and as a consequence goaded them into the revolutionary struggle. By the helping hand of God our fathers came out of that contest not a subdued and

crushed dependency, but a victorious and independent State.

The experiment was now to be made, if a free government, one originating with and controlled by the people could exist; whether it could perpetuate itself by proving a blessing to its subjects and by its own inherent worth and strength gain respectability among the nations of the earth. What has been the issue of this experiment? For over four score years it has been on trial. We to-day show to the observing world that a government coming from the hearts and minds of a free and intelligent people is possible and more stable than the monarchies of the earth, where princes rule by power inherited, and not by the voluntary suffrages of the people. We have proven that a pure church can stand upon the foundation which God hath laid, without leaning on the arm of a corrupting state, and looking upon an earthly prince as its head. Here it has been shown that independence and freedom in the church, which acknowledges Christ alone as its head, is not incompatible with independence and freedom in the State. Here it has also been proven that an individual from the humblest walks in life may not only aspire to, but really attain the highest position in the gift of the people, a position more honorable than that occupied by the most powerful king upon the earth. During the period of our national probation we have had our clouds, our pelting storms, and several hurricanes of war, that have tried most severely every timber of our national fabric. In the more distant past we were compelled to draw the sword in vindication of national honor. In our day, however, we have witnessed and taken part in a contest that had a more important prize at stake: it was nothing less than a struggle for the preservation of national life.

On previous occasions war was waged upon us by foreign powers: but in our day, men of our own household, driven by the madness of the most wretched folly, and given over to judicial blindness, lifted fratricidal hands, and struck at the very heart of the nation; attempted national suicide; that which would have bereaved even the perpetrators of the deed and would have ruined us all. The clarion notes of alarm were sounded throughout the land and the question was put to the people as to whether or not the sacred inheritance bequeathed unto us by our fathers, our national government, purchased at such an immense cost of blood and treasure, should be thus rashly and wickedly destroyed. The answer was given in that majestic uprising of a free people, animated by one resolve, that our national fabric with all its associated blessings should not perish without at least the attempt to ward off the sacrilegious blows. Implements of peace were dropped, and untutored hands took hold of the instruments of war, and the very earth trembled beneath the tread of mighty hosts preparing for the conflict we were forced to accept.

We had been taught that the "race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong": and "that the battle is the Lord's," that He

it is who elevates with victory, or crushes with defeat. God's blessing was asked in this terrible undertaking. With weeping eyes and aching hearts, and in great agony of spirit, we besought Him to undertake for us. Now my hearers, in the light of God's providence let us ask ourselves; what hath the Lord wrought for us? What has been the will of the Lord to us, struggling in mortal conflict with that powerful intestine faction seeking our national ruin?

1. Ah, it is our blessed privilege and high duty this day to thank the Lord for *victory* over our domestic foes, *not partial, but complete, absolute victory*. In the language of Deborah the prophetess and heroine of Israel who sang praises to the Lord when her nation was delivered from the hosts of Sisera we can say, "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of (our nation), when the people willingly offered themselves." Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth the praise. We cannot come into the presence of the God of battles with boastful spirit, for wherewith have we to boast if we have simply performed part of our duty, and if events belong to the Lord? Nor do we come into the presence of the Lord to rejoice in and thank Him for mere success. Mere triumph in a trial of strength would be no compensation for the great price that was paid to secure it. To-day, as we render thanksgiving to the Lord for victory we thank Him for the fruits of victory.

(1) We thank the Lord as a fruit of our success that he *has continued unto us the ordinance of a Civil Government*.

God is as truly the Author of Civil Governments as He is of the church. The only difference is that He stands in a more intimate relation to the latter than He does to the former. "The most High ruleth in the Kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will." Dan, iv, 32. By "Me(saith the Lord)Kings reign and princes decree justice. By Me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." Prov. viii, 15, 16. Let us in our restored government keep before our minds the fact that it is the Lord that continues and puts a period to a nation's existence just as truly as He continues and brings to an end the life of an individual. Have you my hearers accustomed yourselves to think of what would have been our condition had God removed from us this beneficent gift? Without a National Government! We would have had no place among the nations of the earth. Our National emblem would have disappeared from the land and the sea; it would have been stored away among mouldy antiquities as a thing that once signified something. We could have had no respect abroad, and no controlling power at home to keep separate states from devouring one another, no protection to Communities to families, either in person or estate; every safe guard to social, civil, and religious privileges would have been swallowed up in one universal chaos.

O let us thank the Lord to-day that he has not permitted the sceptre to pass from our hands, that He has not given us over to

anarchy, and made us a by-word and a hissing among the nations of the earth.

(2). As a second fruit of victory we thank the Lord that *Slavery* the great exciting cause of our national alienation and strife has been, or is about to be most certainly removed. The Philadelphia Synod, to which we belong, in a series of resolutions adopted unanimously at its last meeting thus refers to the subject.

Resolved.—That special thanksgivings are due to God for the re-establishment of the National authority over all our territory, for the restoration of peace, and for the removal of *Slavery*—that great National evil and one of the Chief causes of the late war.³³

Many years have been spent in both Church and State in discussing this subject. It has always been an element occasioning discord. It imbittered individuals, it caused angry words between travellers, often terminating in bloody and fatal encounters; it caused schism in Churches, and was profanely declared to be the Chief Corner stone of a government proposed to be founded upon the ruins of our nation. God in his providence has spoken to us in regard to this matter, in a moment He cut the gordian knot and has taken away the intricacies over which we had been so long puzzled. That phase of the subject over which there has been a continual conflict, has in the good providence of God been removed. We are henceforth to have no more personal quarrels over it. It is no longer to occupy the precious time of Presbyteries, Synods and General Assemblies; calling forth sharp disputes, hard-sayings, occasioning bitter heart-burnings, alienations, the breaking of tender ties, and thus causing Christ to be wounded in the house of his friends.

It is no longer to occasion angry debates in our National Congress, daily disturbing our national harmony, and constantly threatening our national ruin. Our worthy President in his late message to Congress, referring to the complete eradication of human slavery as a system from the whole land, speaks thus, "This is the measure which will efface the sad memories of the past." * * * "It heals the wound that is still imperfectly closed." * * * "It makes of us, once more a united people, renewed and strengthened, bound more than ever to mutual affection and support."

For the removal of this thing which has caused so many bitter words, so much alienation, so much strife, so much blood, so many precious lives, we, O Lord, from our heart of hearts thank Thee.

(3.) As a 3rd fruit of victory we thank the Lord for an *honorable peace*.

A peace without righteousness, without justice, without the vindication of a just cause would have been no peace. It would simply have been the suspension of hostilities to prepare for future strife: mutual recrimination would again have let loose the dogs of war, and blood would have flown more profusely than before. We all longed, desired, and prayed for peace: but we desired not that temporary

short-lived peace which preceeds another volcanic eruption, bringing death to thousands who are deceived by a proffered security when there is none. God in His own good time has given us an abiding peace, as we believe, as the product of our signal triumph.

Thank the Lord that after a four year's war, with all its attendant woes, we are now greeted with this glad day of relief and peace. No startling war news now distract the mind as we come up to the sanctuary of the Lord. There is no more bidding farewell with loved ones who leave the associations and comforts of home, for the discomforts of the camp, and the perils of battle. The pouring rain, and the cold winter blasts cease to wring the hearts of almost every home in the land. The feverish excitement which ruled by day, and that restlessness of spirit which denied repose during the night, have been driven away by the advent of peace and conscious security. Thank the Lord this night of agony has been chased away by the ushering in of a bright, beautiful, peaceful day, full of hope.

Blessed truth which seems like a pleasing dream rather than a reality, the bugle blast of attention, and forward to battle is no more heard in the land. We look no more upon gallant and manly forms, that one moment are rushing forward upon opposing works and secreted foes, and the next lie maimed and lifeless upon the earth. We hear no more the cry of wounded men pleading for help. There is no more urging stretcher-bearers forward to carry these bleeding ones to where they may receive the meagre attentions of the field-hospital; and this charnal house where strong men writhe and groan, making one perpetual wail of agony, is at length, thank the Lord, closed.

There is now no loading up of ambulances with mangled men who plead to be handled with care. No more hasty burial of the dead, wrapping the slain patriots in great coats or blankets, and thus lower them into their shallow graves, and then ask God to give those who know not that they are bereaved grace and strength to bear the heavy blow, and supplicate the Lord that those who still live, may live for truth and Him, and that the conflict that still rages may eventuate to His glory, and our success—then stained with the blood of those we knew and loved seek remaining comrades in the new point gained, to perform the same sad duties when the terrible work shall commence again at to-morrow's dawn. We thank the Lord that these tragic scenes have closed. God grant that they may never be re-enacted.

In this our day of peace we should also be thankful to the Lord that all through our terrible struggle, we were and are still at peace with foreign nations. The subtle policy of France, the many positive acts of encouragement given by England to treason and rebellion, thus prolonging our intestine strife and multiplying our national bereavements, have and do still, try our patience and magnanimity. In the proud pre-eminence we now occupy let our attitude as

a nation toward these and all other powers of the earth always be that of seeking peace rather than inviting war—let us be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

2. We would be remiss, my hearers, if we did not thank the Lord for the *temporal blessings* he has granted us during the past year, and throughout the whole period of our struggle.

If, in addition to the loss of the sturdy sons of agriculture, the Lord had withheld the early and latter rain, we could not have borne the double burden of famine and war. God, through the laws of nature, wrought for us, and not only gave us our daily bread and enough to provision vast armies of men, but a surplus by which we were able to supply the demands of other nations.

Our various industries first suffered from the sudden and unexpected shock of war and the diversion of our energies into the great war channel. The energy and tact of our people soon brought restoration. Here and there a mill stood still and hammers were silent, yet throughout the whole loyal portion of our land there has been the perpetual hum of busy and varied labor.

Young men left our schools and colleges to take part in the struggle for a higher civilization, yet these fountains of knowledge were still kept open, and carried on the great work of training the youth of our land for a true and noble manhood.

Time fails us to enumerate the many rich temporal blessings we have received from the Author of all good. Suffice it to say, my hearers, that you have special reason to be thankful that your rich and beautiful Chester Valley has not been in the track of marching and contending armies, that the terrible besom of war has not swept away your crops, your cattle, your homes, and made this garden spot a desert waste. Look upon the desolations that war has made, and thank God, and be liberal to those who are in need.

3. Above all we should be thankful to the Lord for *His Spiritual mercies*. During the continuance of the war the doors of our churches have been open. Christ the Saviour of sinners has been faithfully preached. The Bible, the glory of Protestantism, and the great *Magna Charta* of our civil and religious liberties has not been thrown into a corner, but kept open and before the people, carried on the persons, and its rich truths stored up in the hearts of thousands of our brave soldiers. Our Sabbath Schools continued to gather in the young and teach them the great truths of God's word. Our Tract and Missionary Societies have gone forward in faith, trusting in the promise of God, appealing to the liberality of our Christian people, and they have been sustained. While men were offering themselves freely for their country's cause there were not wanting those who for the love of their Divine Master, and his glorious cause offered themselves to go to the distant heathen, and carry aloft the gospel banner in the great war against idolatry.

God the Father did not cease to be gracious. God the Son did not

withdraw the offer of salvation because the men warred. God the Holy Spirit did not cease to urge men to accept of Salvation so freely offered. No, the Lord has not deserted us. He is present with His people now, and nowhere has He been more powerfully and graciously present than within the bounds of our New Castle Presbytery. Here He has manifested Himself in reviving, awakening, and converting power; daily making new conquests, recording in the book of life splendid victories, souls released from prison and from the bondage of Satan. On the Pisgah height of temporal and spiritual blessings, let us this day, with grateful hearts, "offer unto God thanksgiving."

II, The second injunction of the text: *Pay thy vows unto the most high.*"

It is perfectly natural for us to make vows or promises to the Lord when under the influence of imminent danger. This is also true when sensibly impressed with Divine goodness in freeing us from threatened evil and securing unto us positive blessings. Now my hearers it is scarcely possible for us to have passed through the fiery scrutiny of the last four years without having made certain resolves to God, promises to be more faithful to the principles of justice, truth, pure morality, law and order. We have witnessed what discord, what strife, what woe has been brought upon our whole land by the violation of these sacred virtues, and therefore we have vowed that we would be more faithful *Christian Citizens*.

1. Some men who have always been devotedly attached to the cause of Christ, have from natural distaste for the busy, rough, and too often wicked activity of the world, neglected to perform their duties as Civilians. Others who have not read the scriptures aright think they are free from all obligations to their respective communities, in a civil capacity. But the great majority of Christians go down into the contests of the world, not with the determination of enforcing, if possible, a higher morality into the administration of public affairs, but to readily yield to the men of the world, and as a consequence to the Godless spirit of the world.

The Christian citizen should always keep in remembrance, that much of the word of God treats of civil affairs, that many of its promises are concerning nations, and national developements, and that many of its prophecies tell of the rise, progress, decay and fall of governments. We should remember that "many of the Psalms are the songs of a rejoicing kingdom and that the Proverbs had a king for their author and are full of the wisest political maxims." We should remember that the apostles would make theology practical in the epistles of the New Testament by enforcing its requirements upon men in the performance of their domestic, social, and civil duties. We should remember as the custodian of the Word of God that the Decalogue is the foundation of all law, and that we are recreant to an important duty we owe to God and man, if we permit

laws relating to morality to be regulated by any lower standard.

We also profess as Christians to have faith in unadulterated truth, uncontaminated justice, justice without being robbed of her scales, administered in vindication of the majesty of law, as a penalty to evil doers, and a protection to those who do well. We believe in temperance, and temperance laws, not dead statutes, but living operating enactments. We believe in the morality of the Scriptures, that it should be the morality of both public and private life. We believe in the commandment requiring strict observance of God's Holy Day. We believe in the duty of an enlightened people such as we profess to be to elevate in the moral scale, by education and industry, all persons within our borders, let them be of whatever race or class they may. This we believe, this is in part our profession of faith. Alas! alas! how recreant we have been in the past to these principles. Let us henceforth show our faith by our works, remembering that faith without works is dead. Never was there more urgent demand for these truths to be brought out into the open field than now. Knight never buckled on armor in nobler and holier cause than that now calling loudly for Christian activity. This is a day in which every Christian citizen should rejoice in the mottoes of him whom we still delight to call the father of his country—

“Deeds not words.”

“For God and my Country.”

2. In this great epoch in our national history, Christians above all others should remember that God is in the history of nations, that His rule among the peoples of the earth is for a specific purpose, viz, for the advancement of His glory, for the extension of the Messiah's Kingdom. And now in the day of restoration, if our minds are simply occupied in thinking of ourselves, as a great nation, on a proud and defying eminence as regards the other nations of the earth, we sadly err and have lost sight of the great historical lesson of the day. I will yield to no man in hearty gratulations at the restoration of our national ensign over the whole length and breadth of our land. There is, however, another emblem, we must place above our Country's flag, that is the emblem of Messiah's Kingdom, the Cross. Because we love our country much it is no reason that we should not love the cross more. As Christians we are to look upon our restored land as a vast amphitheatre which we are called upon to enter, and with all the wisdom and power that God has given us contend earnestly for religious truth. The Lord's hand in our struggle was not simply to save the United States Government as an end, but to preserve it, to make use of it for the advancement of his spiritual kingdom, simply a means to an end. The Lord over all elevates us to the dignity and honor of being co-workers with Him, and calls upon us, nay commands us to make use of our increased privileges and opportunities with an eye single to this end. Let us then my hearers with increased faith and large expectations commence our

renewed service "by paying our vows unto the Most High."

(a). Our days of war, were days of *profuse liberality*. To look upon the vast collection of stores that came from the intelligent, moral and christian people of our land, and ~~were~~^{were} dispensed to the needy by the Christian and Sanitary Commissions, we had a magnificent testimonial of our nations beneficence. Has the demand for liberality ceased with the close of our struggle? Are there no maimed patriots, no widows, no orphans in the land? Are the desert wastes of the South, the poor of the South, and the freedmen who plead for charity to be looked upon with cold indifference? Are we not to commence again missionary work on our borders? and must not the hardy sons of the north who by thousands are seeking homes in the South be followed by the means of grace? Must not the leaven of the Gospel be at work upon the great multitudes who come from foreign lands to seek homes in our disenthralled country? Are we in the days of our manly prowess and triumph, as a nation, to go back as a Church, in losing sight of the vast foreign field that is yet to be subdued to the Lord? The imperative demands that come from these different fields, show that there must be no relaxation in liberality. We have, in many ways, vowed to the Lord that we would, when He should remove the dark war-cloud from us, be more faithful to His cause. His displeasure will be upon us if we pay not these vows.

(b). During the war we were *liberal in men*. How many households gave their pride, their stay, their hope. Alas how many there are who return not again to enjoy these days of sweet peace for which they struggled. But the battle of the Lord still goes on, there is no discharge in this warfare. Why, O professing christians do you stand so listless, so inactive when the conflict between light and darkness still rages? Why let your armor rust when it should be burnished by being wielded in the actual conflict? Remember this day your vows to the Most High. Christian parents, you have observed how, from time to time, the leaders of the Lord's hosts fall in the conflict, and there are vacancies, and the soldiers of the cross become disheartened and scattered because they have no one to marshal them and lead them on; have you no son to give to the great captain of the host to serve Him in His ministry, who may go forth with the high honor of having a commission from Heaven, to do valiant service in the battles of the Lord? You have in solemn vows dedicated your offspring to the Lord in infancy, and promised to train them up in His nurture and fear. Pay your vows unto the Lord this day by recommencing duties that have been neglected in training up those whom the Lord has given you, and if the Lord sees fit to confer upon any of them the high honor of commissioning them for the public ministry, rejoice in the fact that the Lord has separated them from the world for this glorious work.

(c). In our days of blood we were liberal in *our prayers*. How

many prayers ascended from households all over this land, for the protection of those whom we loved ; how many prayers were daily offered for the salvation of the great number who were dying in hospitals, and falling upon the battle field ; with what importunity did we besiege the throne of grace, praying that our land might be delivered from schism and war. Should we be more sparing now in our supplications ? Have we paid our vows to the Lord in wrestling for His spiritual blessing upon ourselves, upon our families, our church, our country, the world ?

(d). We thank the Lord to day for a *national unity*. The fiery furnace of war through which we have passed, and the heavy and repeated blows that have been given, have welded our separate States together in more indissoluble bonds than united them before. While we rejoice in this, have we no aspirations for the unity of the body of Christ? The day promised shall come, when there will be one Lord, one faith, one baptism. God the Father has the time in store when the prayer of the eternal Son shall be answered. His supplication to the Father was, that all His followers might be bound together in the spirit of unity : "That they all may be one ; as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us," (John xvii 21.) This universal *Christian Republic*, embracing all the nations of the earth under the ample folds of its beneficent reign, should be the burden of the Christian's prayers, the object of his labors.

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